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ABSTRACT

A study assessed the levels of bullying behavior at Hale School, an independent boys' day and boarding school in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia. In excess of 900 boys completed a survey instrument in 1994 and 1996. Results indicated that, despite a widely publicized program and the publication of anti-bullying and harassment policies, levels of bullying decreased only slightly in the 2-year life of the program, and that levels of bullying within the classroom increased. Further, despite an increased willingness on the part of students to report bullying to parents, they were less willing to report bullying matters to teachers. Findings reinforce the value of survey questionnaires to gauge the effectiveness of programs such as the anti-bullying interventions. (Contains the survey instrument and a table of data.) (Author/RS)

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From: Bill Hutchinson <billh@hale.wa.edu.au>
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Please find attached a text file outlining a study of school bullying assessment and monitoring.

MONITORING SCHOOL BULLYING

A REVIEW OF ONE SCHOOL'S PROGRAM FOR ASSESSING AND MONITORING THE PROBLEM.

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Abstract

Many schools are instituting programs specifically designed to monitor and reduce the occurrence of bullying behavior. Hale School, an independent boys' day and boarding school in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia developed a 19-item Bullying Questionnaire to assess levels of bullying behavior within the school community. The instrument was completed by in excess of 900 students in 1994 and 1996. The results indicated that, despite a widely publicised program and the publication of anti-bullying and harassment policies, levels of bullying decreased only slightly in the two-year life of the program. Indeed, the levels of bullying within the classroom increased. Further, despite an increased willingness on the part of students to report bullying to parents, they were less unwilling to report bullying matters to teachers. The results reinforced the value of survey questionnaires to provide useful and timely information for school administrators to gauge the effectiveness of programs such the anti-bullying interventions.

Introduction

In Australia concern about bullying in schools has received considerable attention in both the popular press and academic publications. The seriousness with which the phenomenon is regarded by authorities may be gauged by the fact that, in 1994, school bullying became the focus of an inquiry by the House of Representatives.

Slee (1996) provides a definition of bullying which encapsulates features of Australian and overseas discussions on the behaviors:

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Repeated intimidation, over time, of a physical, verbal or psychological nature of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons. (Slee, 1996, p. 64).

The House of Representatives Inquiry quoted by Slee (1996) noted that such behavior "was ... prevalent in the Australian school system" (Slee, 1996, p. 63). Data presented to the inquiry suggested that approximately 14 percent of students are subject to serious bullying during their school careers Slee, 1996, p. 63). Because victims of bullying are likely to "suffer physically, socially, psychologically and academically" (Slee, 1996, p.64), "early intervention programs to address violent and antisocial behavior in students" were promoted (Slee, 1996, p.64).

Such intervention programs have been introduced in a large number of schools. A common strategy, both prior to enacting policies to combat the problem of bullying, and as an evaluation of program success, has been a needs assessment to gauge the extent of the problem. Schools have either adopted widely-used published instruments, such as Rigby and Slee's (1992) Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ), or, as the case of Hale School, developed context specific instruments to assess the nature and extent of bullying behaviors.

In Hale School, the use of a Bullying Questionnaire comprised one part of a four-stage program which aimed to assess, monitor and combat the problem bullying behavior in the school. Stage one involved the inservicing of all staff from Years One to 12 by internationally-renowned experts in the field, Delwyn and Eva Tattum.

Following this, a Bullying Committee comprised of teaching staff, pastoral care and counseling representatives and members of the parent body and the administration was formed. This second stage of the program development comprised two concurrent activities: a survey of students from Years Three to 12 to assess the extent and nature of bullying in the school; and, involvement in further professional development by selected members of the committee, with a view to developing a School Bullying Policy. The survey was repeated in 1996 and students will be surveyed next in 1998. The survey results have provided, and will continue to provide, the school with considerable data upon which to base the evaluation of the success of its bullying program.

Key school personnel attended seminars presented by the Catholic Education Office in Perth. These CEO seminars aimed primarily at assisting schools in the development of school-levels strategies to combat the problem. The report from the Bullying Committee was responsible for the publication of the School Bullying Policy which was mailed to all parents prior to the commencement of the 1996 school year.

Method

Participants.

The survey was completed by students in years three to 12 in each of the years in which it was conducted. In 1994, the total

number of students who completed questionnaires was 971 and, in 1996, 917 students participated in the survey.

Instrument.

The instrument comprised 19 items. Items one to five returned categorical data. Items six to eight comprised questions under the heading "About this school and friends". Items nine to 16 were grouped under the heading "About being bullied yourself". Item 17 was categorized as "About bullying others" and items 18 and 19 were "About how the school handles bullying". Figure 1 lists the items of the instrument.

Procedure.

The questionnaire was anonymous. No record of class, year or identifying marks, other than the categories in the first five items, were recorded. Students completed the questionnaire in class under teacher supervision during the last three weeks of second term.=20
Students answered the questions by selecting the appropriate response and marking their choices on a computer answering sheet.

Analysis of data

The data were analyzed by the school by comparing the percentages of responses in each response category for each item. The raw data were coded by the use of the Systat statistical package (Systat, 1992).

Results

The results of the study are reported in Table 1. In Hale School, the percentage of students who reported being bullied more than few times a week rose to 13 percent from 10 percent in 1994. In addition, eight percent of students hated school in 1996 as opposed to five percent in 1994. The percentage of students who stated they had no friends rose slightly from two to three percent.

The responses to the section of the instrument entitled "About being bullied yourself" identified increases in the incidence of bullying between class and in class time but a decrease in the incidence of recess and lunchtime bullying. The trend towards increased incidence of bullying in class and between classes was also reported in relation to where the bullying occurred.
In addition, the type of bullying changed. Reductions in physical attacks and exclusion bullying were noted. However, verbal bullying and property damage and theft increased.

The severity of the effects of bullying on the victims decreased in all categories of response except "Extremely".

This pattern evident in relation to the way in which students would choose to deal with incidents of bullying warrants comment. More students reported in relation to Item 14 that they took no action when they were bullied, but there were also slight increases in the percentage of those who avoided class or

reported it to parents or staff members. Given the responses to Item 14, the responses to item 15, "If I was bullied I would tell a staff member", showed what may be termed a lack of confidence in reporting bullying incidents to staff members. An increased percentage of students indicated they "never" tell a member of staff. This is despite a response pattern in relation to item 18 which indicates that the students' levels of satisfaction with the school's methods of dealing with problems have risen. In addition, there was an increase in the numbers of students who would tell parents. This was most noticeable in the category of "always" where four percent indicated that they would choose this option in 1994 but 19 percent indicated they would select this approach in 1996.

The response pattern to item 18 showed that attitudes to the way the school handled bullying became more positive across the two surveys.
However, there remained a large group who were "fairly" or "very unsatisfied" (25 percent). Slight increases in the need to improve the way in which the school handled in-class bullying were consistent with the rise of that type of bullying in previous responses.

In relation to item 19 "In what ways could the school improve the ways it handles bullying?, the students' responses indicated approval for the school's methods for all categories of response except for small increases in the options of teaching students to handle the situation better and providing closer supervision in class. This latter response is consistent with the response patterns evident for items 10 and 11.

In summary a comparison between the 1994 results of the bullying survey and those of 1996 indicated mixed success for the bullying initiatives that had been introduced at Hale School. The incidence of bullying seems to have increased since 1994. This increase was evident in the case of classroom bullying, especially. The rise was accompanied by a widening of student views as to the need for the policy and the way in which the school handled bullying incidents. In particular, while students of 1996 were more willing to report bullying to parents, the same cannot be said for staff.

Discussion

The data collected from the analysis of student responses during the years 1994 to 1996 provide the basis upon which an evaluation of the bullying policy at Hale School may be made. The comments made in this discussion will, therefore, address two issues, the data-related results and the implications that those results hold for administrators at the school.

The Bullying Questionnaire provides the basis for evaluation of the effectiveness of the school bullying program and the policy which underpins it. The anti-bullying initiatives put in place by the school have been only limited in their effectiveness, compared with published results from other sources (Olweus, 1989). The reported levels of bullying at the school increased for the most bullied groups for the 1996 responses.

This should be a cause for concern. Comparative schemes reported in the literature reported "substantial reductions in bullying" two years after the start of the campaign (Olweus, 1989). A further cause for concern compared with Olweus' (1989) Norwegian data is the level of satisfaction with, or liking for, the school. At Hale School, percentages of students who reported they hated the school increased.

Students at Hale School choose not to tell staff members when they are bullied, despite a school-wide policy that telling someone is the correct thing to do; don't suffer in silence. This is a worrying trend which has the potential to counter the effectiveness of any school-based anti-bullying program. While students were far more willing to tell parents in the event of bullying. However, the unwillingness of the students to seek assistance from staff members in all but the most acute cases, must surely indicate lack of confidence in the staff members' approach to the students who would come to them with problems.

The question which these data do not answer is 'Why this negative attitude towards members of staff?'. A clue to this attitude may be found in the responses relating to items 10 and 11. Approximately forty-six percent of all bullying in 1996 occurred within the school day, nine percent in class time. In 1994 only six percent of bullying was reported as occurring in class time. If the teachers are supposed to actively supervise the grounds and, more especially, to be actively aware of what is happening in their classes, it is little wonder that the students perceive that the value of the teachers as persons to whom the victim can turn when in trouble is limited.

In classrooms directly under the control of the teachers, especially, to have nine percent of students report that the bullying actually occurs in this context must surely point to either unawareness or collaboration on the part of the teacher in some circumstances. The teacher may intentionally or unintentionally provide support for the bullies or actually adopt the bullying role themselves.

This issue is one, among a number of others, which need further clarification. The present data report only student responses. In 1994, staff responses were sought but the response rate was so low as to render any generalizations based upon those data as suspect. There would appear to be an urgent need to rectify this lack of staff input so that comparisons with student responses may be made. Given the student reports of increased in-class bullying, the collection of teacher comments would provide an invaluable source of information for those evaluating the success of the program and planning ongoing professional development activities relating to classroom management.

A second issue which should be addressed by the school is the problem of identifying specific class groups in relation to the items which comprised the measure. Anecdotal evidence would seem to indicate that differences in the levels and types of bullying and reactions to it may differ across year groups in the school. A closer investigation of this possibility is warranted.

A third issue is the establishment of reliability data for

The Bullying Questionnaire. The measure appears to hold promise in the measurement of bullying-related phenomena in schools and its utility and the conclusions that may be drawn from the data collected would be strengthened by the calculation of the reliability of the instrument.

Conclusion

The data reported in this paper were collected as part of a program to identify the levels and nature of bullying behavior at an independent boy's day and boarding school in Perth, Western Australia. The data collection was one element of a three-part program to reduce levels of bullying. However, on the basis of the data, the Bullying and Harassment policies enacted by Hale School seem to have had limited success in reducing the levels of bullying.

The ongoing program of surveying students by The Bullying Questionnaire does, however, show the use of the process in the monitoring not only the nature and levels of bullying behavior at the school but also the success of the anti-bullying program. The school should use these data as clear indications of the dissatisfaction of a sizable number of students with aspects of the anti-bullying program. The data clearly indicate four areas of concern which should receive priority treatment by school authorities: the attitudes of students to the school; the levels of bullying generally; the extent of bullying within classroom contexts; and, the unwillingness of students to approach teachers to report incidents of bullying behavior.

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Figure 1 Items in the Bullying Questionnaire

Item No.	Item
1	Year level
2	Year arrived at Hale School
3	Day/boarder
4	Citizenship
5	Main language spoken at home
6	How do you feel about coming to this school?
7	How many friends do you have at this school?
8	Have you seen bullying at this school?
9	How often have you been bullied at this school since the start of last term?
10	When did the bullying occur?
11	Where did the bullying occur?
12	How were you bullied?
13	How much did the bullying affect you?
14	What action did you take when you were bullied?
15	If I was bullied I would tell a staff member?
16	If I was bullied I would tell my parents?
17	How many times have you bullied others since the start of last term?
18	How satisfied are you with the way the school handles bullying?
19	In what ways could the school improve the ways it handles bullying?

Table 2 Multiple choice responses to bullying questionnaire 1994 -1996: percentage of response in each category

Response categories	% in each group 1994N=3D971		1996N=3D917	
6. How do you feel about coming to this school?				
A I really like it.		16		19
B I like it.	35		31	
C It=92s OK.	36		36	
D I don=92t like it.		7		6
E I hate it.	6		8	
7. How many friends do you have in this school?				
A Many	39		41	
B Quite a few	40		37	
C A few	16		15	
D One or two.	4		4	
E None.	2		3	
8. Have your seen bullying at this school?				
A Never	4		9	
B Rarely (once or twice a term)		25		30
C Occasionally (once or twice a week)		32		25
D Often (a few times a week)		23		17
E A lot (at least once every day)		17		19
9. Have often have you been bullied at this school since the start of last term?				
A Never	40		42	

B Rarely (once or twice a term) 38 33
C Occasionally (once or twice a week) 13 12
D Often (a few times a week) 6 7
E A lot (at least once every day) 4 6

10. When did the bullying occur?
A Never 37 41
B Before or after school 17 14
C Recess or lunchtime 38 32
D Between classes 2 5
E In class time 7 9

11. Where did the bullying occur?
A It never happened. 38 39
B Outside the school grounds 7 5
C Inside the school grounds 49 46
D Lining up for class 2 3
E In class 4 7
=09

12. How were you bullied?
A It never happened. 39 41
B Verbal attacks 38 42
C Physical attacks 18 12
D Property/clothing damage/theft 1 3
E Excluded/rejected 4 3

13. How much did the bullying affect you?
A It never happened. 37 39
B Not at all 21 24
C A little 28 25
D Quite a lot 10 9
E Extremely 3 4

14. What action did you take when you were bullied?
A No action taken. 40 43
B Ignored it 37 34
C Fought or teased back 17 16
D Avoided school/class 1 2
E Reported it to staff/parents 5 6

15. If I was bullied I would tell a staff member?
A Never. 37 44
B Sometimes 54 47
C Always 14 9

16. If I was bullied I would tell a parent?
A Never. 55 26
B Sometimes 41 55
C Always 4 19

17. How many times have you bullied others since the start of last term?
A Never. 41 47
B Rarely (once or twice) 44 35
C Occasionally (once or twice a week) 9 11
D Often (a few times a week) 3 3
E A lot (at least once a day) 3 5

18. How satisfied are you with the way the school handles bullying?
A Very satisfied. 9 16
B Fairly satisfied 20 25

C	Don=92t know	42	34	
D	Fairly unsatisfied	16	13	
E	Very unsatisfied	13	12	

19. In what ways could the school improve the ways it handles bullying?

A	Nothing.	20	28	
B	Closer supervision in class	3	5	
C	Closer supervision outside class time	18	17	
D	Teach students how to handle it better	18	19	
E	Identify and do something about the bullies	41	32	